The Priesthood & the Keys

Study guide Overview

What is the purpose of the Priesthood? What are the keys of the Priesthood? Being able to answer these basic questions can help us to begin to understand the authority claims of others, and test their validity.

Please print out this guide, and prayerfully read and ponder over the teachings of the scriptures and the Prophet Joseph Smith on these matters, asking yourself any of the question included here, and noting down any additional questions that arise from your study. (If you have a spouse or older children try to study these things with them.)

Study Suggestions

Begin your study with prayer, praying for God to reveal the truth to you through His Spirit.

Consider the questions on the "The Priesthood" & "The Keys" pages.

Pay special attention to the following passages –
(They are included at the end of this guide if you do not have the books)

> If you haven't read it for a while, read JS-H 1:66-74 & 27:5-13 & 128:20-21
>
> Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pages 112, 157-158, 308 & 322.
>
> Also read D&C 110.

Find answers within the scriptures & the teachings of Joseph Smith.
(Discussing them with your spouse or a close friend if possible)

Be conscious of the Spirit throughout your studies, and close with prayer.

Make a list of any additional questions you might have, to share with the Seventy who gave you this guide.

Online Resources

The Scriptures – http://scriptures.lds.org

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith - http://www.boap.org/LDS/Joseph-Smith/Teachings/

The Journals of Discourses - http://journalofdiscourses.org

Note: readings (except scriptural) are included in the Resources section

The Priesthood

Read at least page 112, 308 & 322 of Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

What is the purpose of the Priesthood?

"A man can do nothing for himself ..." - TPJS 364
"The heavenly Priesthood will unite ..." - TPJS 232
"Respecting the Melchizedek Priesthood ..." - TPJS 322
"What was the power of Melchizedek ..." - TPJS 322 - democratic or theocratic?
TPJS 112 - read whole page - are any offices unnecessary?

How should it be decided who is worthy to be ordained to the Priesthood?

D&C 20:60
AoF 5
"We believe in the Gift of the Holy Ghost ..." - TPJS 243

How long will Priesthood remain on earth?

D&C 86:10
D&C 84:17

When does heaven respect earthly priesthood administrations?

D&C 121:36-37
"The power, glory and blessings of the Priesthood ..." TPJS 169

Was the Priesthood fully restored in 1829?

D&C 2:1
D&C 124:28
D&C 127:8
"instructing them in the principles and order of the Priesthood ..." - TPJS 237

Are there different degrees of Priesthood?

"All Priesthood is Melchizedek ..." - TPJS 180-181
"If a man gets the fullness of the Priesthood ..." - TPJS 308
"There are three grand orders of Priesthood ..." - TPJS 322-323
see pages 237 & 339.

What is the effect of changing laws and ordinances on the Priesthood?

"The Priesthood is everlasting ..." - TPJS 158
see p. 308

The Keys

"It is necessary to know who holds the keys of power,
and who does not, or we are likely to be deceived."
Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, p. 336

Read at least D&C 110 & pages 157-158 of Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Are the keys dependent upon the Church?

Joseph received some keys before being Church President - D&C 13:1 / 27:12
Joseph received other keys after being Church President - D&C 110:16

How many preside over all the keys?

D&C 132:7

What is presiding those keys conditional upon?

D&C 64:5

Will the keys be lost or re-restored?

D&C 27:13 / D&C 65:2

Keys of Elijah -

"Elijah was the last prophet that held the keys ..." - TPJS 172
"Now for Elijah. The spirit, power, and calling of Elijah ..." - TPJS 337

Readings from
Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Two 1834–37, p.112

A High Priest is a member of the same Melchizedek Priesthood with the Presidency, but not of the same power or authority in the Church. The Seventies are also members of the same priesthood, [i.e., the High Priesthood], are a sort of traveling council or Priesthood, and may preside over a church or churches, until a High Priest can be had. The Seventies are to be taken from the quorum of Elders, and are not to be High Priests. They are subject to the direction and dictation of the Twelve, who have the keys of the ministry. All are to preach the Gospel, by the power and influence of the Holy Ghost; and no man can preach the Gospel without the Holy Ghost.

The Bishop is a High Priest, and necessarily so, because he is to preside over that particular branch of Church affairs, that is denominated the Lesser Priesthood, and because we have no direct lineal descendant of Aaron, to whom it would of right belong. This is the same, or a branch of the same, Priesthood, which may be illustrated by the figure of the human body, which has different members, which have different offices to perform; all are necessary in their place, and the body is not complete without all the members.

From a retrospect of the requirements of the servants of God to preach the Gospel, we find few qualified even to be Priest, and if a Priest understands his duty, his calling, and ministry, and preaches by the Holy Ghost, his enjoyment is as great as if he were one of the Presidency; and his services are necessary in the body, as are also those of Teachers and Deacons. Therefore, in viewing the Church as a whole, we may strictly denominate it one Priesthood. ...

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Four 1839–42, p.157

The Prophet on Priesthood

The Priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed, as in Genesis 1:26, 27, 28. He had dominion given him over every living creature. He is Michael the Archangel, spoken of in the Scriptures. Then to Noah, who is Gabriel: he stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood; he was called of God to this office, and was the father of all living in this day, and to him was given the dominion. These men held keys first on earth, and then in heaven.

Priesthood Everlasting

The Priesthood is an everlasting principle, and existed with God from eternity, and will to eternity, without beginning of days or end of years. The keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent. When they are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam's authority.

Adam the Oldest Man

Daniel in his seventh chapter speaks of the Ancient of days; he means the oldest man, our Father Adam, Michael, he will call his children together and hold a council with them to prepare them for the coming of the Son of Man. He (Adam) is the father of the human family, and presides over the spirits of all men, and all that have had the keys must stand before him in this grand council. This may take place before some of us leave this stage of action. The Son of Man stands before him, and there is given him glory and dominion. Adam delivers up his stewardship to Christ, that which was delivered to him as holding the keys of the universe, but retains his standing as head of the human family.

The Spirit of Man

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Four 1839–42, p.158

The spirit of man is not a created being;5 it existed from eternity, and will exist to eternity. Anything created cannot be eternal; and earth, water, etc., had their existence in an elementary state, from eternity. Our Savior speaks of children and says, Their angels always stand before my Father. The Father called all spirits before Him at the creation of man, and organized them. He (Adam) is the head, and was told to multiply. The keys were first given to him, and by him to others. He will have to give an account of his stewardship, and they to him.

Keys Given to Peter, James and John

The Priesthood is everlasting. The Savior, Moses, and Elias, gave the keys to Peter, James and John, on the mount, when they were transfigured before him. The Priesthood is everlasting—without beginning of days or end of years; without father, mother, etc. If there is no change of ordinances there is no change of Priesthood. Wherever the ordinances of the Gospel are administered, there is the Priesthood.

Descent of Priesthood

How have we come at the Priesthood in the last days? It came down, down, in regular succession. Peter, James, and John had it given to them and they gave it to others. Christ is the Great High Priest; Adam next. Paul speaks of the Church coming to an innumerable company of angels—to God the Judge of all the spirits of just men made perfect; to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant. (Hebrews 12:22-24.)

I saw Adam in the valley of Adam-ondi-Ahman. He called together his children and blessed them with a patriarchal blessing. The Lord appeared in their midst, and he (Adam) blessed them all, and foretold what should befall them to the latest generation.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Five 1842–43, p.264

Gospel Always the Same

Now taking it for granted that the scriptures say what they mean, and mean what they say, we have sufficient grounds to go on and prove from the Bible that the gospel has always been the same, and the officers to officiate, the same; and the signs and fruits resulting from the promises, the same: therefore, as Noah was a preacher of righteousness he must have been baptized and ordained to the priesthood by the laying on of the hands, etc. For no man taketh this honor unto himself except he be called of God as was Aaron, and Aaron was baptized in the cloud and in the sea, together with all Israel, as is related by the Apostle in Corinthians. This position or fact, is witnessed in this manner: the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham, and practiced steadily up to the departing of Israel out of Egypt, was abandoned in the wilderness, forty years—and renewed by Joshua after he passed over Jordan, and encamped at Gilgal, where he made sharp knives and circumcised the whole male portion of the church.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.308

The main object was to build unto the Lord a house whereby He could reveal unto His people the

ordinances of His house and the glories of His kingdom, and teach the people the way of salvation; for there are certain ordinances and principles that, when they are taught and practiced, must be done in a place or house built for that purpose.

Principles of the Gospel Never Change

It was the design of the councils of heaven before the world was, that the principles and laws of the priesthood should be predicated upon the gathering of the people in every age of the world. Jesus did everything to gather the people, and they would not be gathered, and He therefore poured out curses upon them. Ordinances instituted in the heavens before the foundation of the world, in the priesthood, for the salvation of men, are not to be altered or changed. All must be saved on the same principles.
Salvation for the Dead

It is for the same purpose that God gathers together His people in the last days, to build unto the Lord a house to prepare them for the ordinances and endowments, washings and anointings, etc. One of the ordinances of the house of the Lord is baptism for the dead. God decreed before the foundation of the world that the ordinances should be administered in a font prepared for the purpose in the house of the Lord. "This is only your opinion, sir," says the sectarian. * * *

If a man gets a fullness of the priesthood of God he has to get it in the same way that Jesus Christ obtained it, and that was by keeping all the commandments and obeying all the ordinances of the house of the Lord.

Where there is no change of priesthood, there is no change of ordinances, says Paul. If God has not changed the ordinances and the priesthood, howl, ye sectarians! If he has when and where has He revealed it? Have ye turned revelators? Then why deny revelation?

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.322

If I have sinned, I have sinned outwardly; but surely I have contemplated the things of God.

Respecting the Melchizedek Priesthood, the sectarians never professed to have it; consequently they never could save any one, and would all be damned together. There was an Episcopal priest who said he had the priesthood of Aaron, but had not the priesthood of Melchizedek: and I bear testimony that I never have found the man who claimed the Priesthood of Melchizedek. The power of the Melchizedek Priesthood is to have the power of "endless lives"; for the everlasting covenant cannot be broken.

The law was given under Aaron for the purpose of pouring out judgments and destructions.

...

Three Grand Orders

There are three grand orders of priesthood referred to here.

1st. The King of Shiloam (Salem) had power and authority over that of Abraham, holding the key and the power of endless life. Angels desire to look into it, but they have set up too many stakes. God cursed the children of Israel because they would not receive the last law from Moses.

The sacrifice required of Abraham in the offering up of Isaac, shows that if a man would attain to the keys of the kingdom of an endless life; he must sacrifice all things. When God offers a blessing or knowledge to a man, and he refuses to receive it, he will be damned. The Israelites prayed that God

would speak to Moses and not to them; in consequence of which he cursed them with a carnal law.

What was the power of Melchizedek? 'Twas not the Priesthood of Aaron which administers in outward ordinances, and the offering of sacrifices. Those holding the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood are kings and priests of the Most High God, holding the keys of power and blessings. In fact, that Priesthood is a perfect law of theocracy, and stands as God to give laws to the people, administering endless lives to the sons and daughters of Adam.

Abraham says to Melchizedek, I believe all that thou hast taught me concerning the priesthood and the coming of the Son of Man; so Melchizedek ordained Abraham and sent him away. Abraham rejoiced, saying, Now I have a priesthood.

Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Section Six 1843–44, p.323

The Mission of Elijah

Salvation could not come to the world without the mediation of Jesus Christ.

How shall God come to the rescue of this generation? He will send Elijah the prophet. The law revealed to Moses in Horeb never was revealed to the children of Israel as a nation. Elijah shall reveal the covenants to seal the hearts of the father to the children, and the children to the fathers

The anointing and sealing is to be called, elected and made sure.

"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." The Melchizedek Priesthood holds the right from the eternal God, and not by descent from father and mother; and that priesthood is as eternal as God Himself, having neither beginning of days nor end of life.

The 2nd Priesthood is Patriarchal authority. Go to and finish the temple, and God will fill it with power, and you will then receive more knowledge concerning this priesthood.

The 3rd is what is called the Levitical Priesthood, consisting of priests to administer in outward ordinances, made without an oath; but the Priesthood of Melchizedek is by an oath and covenant.

The Holy Ghost is God's messenger to administer in all those priesthoods.

Jesus Christ is the heir of this Kingdom—the Only Begotten of the Father according to the flesh, and holds the keys over all this world.

Men have to suffer that they may come upon Mount Zion and be exalted above the heavens.

I know a man that has been caught up to the third heavens, and can say, with Paul, that we have seen and heard things that are not lawful to utter. (Aug. 27, 1843.) DHC 5:554-556.